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CIA Calls for Stronger Secrets Protection
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The CIA recommended Tuesday that its files on intelligence agents be placed completely off limits to those using the Freedom of Information Act to declassify government secrets.

Deputy CIA Director John McMahon said under the current system of declassification it is impossible for the agency to provide "an iron-clad guarantee" that sources of intelligence and the methods used to obtain it are protected.

McMahon testified in support of legislation pushed by Sen. Barry Goldwater, R-Ariz., chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, and Sen. Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Appearing at a rare public meeting of the intelligence panel, McMahon said, "It is difficult ... to convince one who is secretly cooperating with us that some day he will not awaken to find in a U.S. newspaper or magazine an article that identified him as a U.S. spy."

Goldwater said the legislation has President Reagan's support.

On an unrelated matter, Goldwater said he is distressed by the number of information requests to the CIA originating from foreign sources, and also by the number of new books describing past CIA operations.

He specifically cited requests by the Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini asking for information about the former Shah of Iran, and a new book describing in detail a tunnel dug by the CIA under West Berlin in the 1950s which monitored Soviet communications.

"Isn't there any way you can clamp down on this type of literary effort?" Goldwater asked.

The Goldwater bill is the latest in a series of administrative and legislative steps taken by the Reagan administration to narrow the kinds of information which can be obtained by journalists, authors or others seeking use the Freedom of Information, or FOI, law to obtain specifics of CIA activities.

In one recent action, the CIA reclassified some information already made public.

The CIA contends that it spends too much time and money in FOI requests which result in the release of relatively little information.

Sen. John Chafee, R-R.I., said the number of requests to the CIA under FOI has declined steadily from 6,600 in 1975 to about 1,000 last year.